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of sleeping on, or a single large bamboo mat, besides a quantity of old clothes, blankets, pillows, and rags scattered about or hanging from the rough ends of the walls. At either the front or back of the large outer room, whichever is toward the east—the place of honor in a Karen house—is a raised platform called the "hso hko." This is about a cubit's height from the floor and has a mat on it worn shiny with much sitting. It is the place where guests are received, especially if they are people of note. Here against the wall are a few pillows, which may be half-round bamboos of giant size, that is, from eight to ten inches in diameter, or cloth pillows filled with fibre from the cotton tree *(Bombax heterophylla)*. The guest is invited to sit on the platform and to partake of the contents of the fragrant betel-box, which is sure to be hospitably pushed in front of him. The cradle usually hangs from the crossbeams in the middle of the room, being held up by fibre ropes, although occasionally elephant chains are called into use to give full measure of security. The cradle itself may be a blanket swung up at the four corners, or it may be part of the trunk of a large hollow tree. A basket-work cradle is scarcely ever found in old Karen homes.

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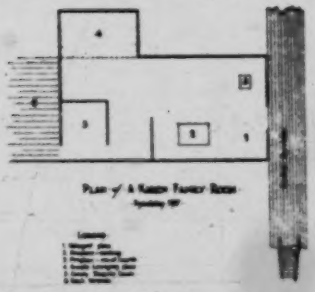

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At the back of the family apartment the bamboo joists and flooring project several feet beyond the wall, forming a primitive back veranda where clothes are hung to dry; rice (paddy), fish, fruit, and vegetables are set out in the sun, and other domestic operations are carried on in private.

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In a few Karen villages a young men's club-room ("blaw") is still maintained, but not in most. Where such a room exists, it does not differ in general appearance from a family-room, except that it has no partitions. The hearth in the middle of the space serves as a social fireside on cold mornings and evenings. At the east end a raised dais extends the width of the room, being used both for reception and for sleeping purposes. Guests, unless closely related to some family in the village, usually sleep here, except when, as a mark of respect, they are invited to sleep in a room apart on the "hso hko" with the men of the house. Women guests sleep in the family sleeping-room together with the women folk and children.

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The old type of Karen village-house, such as we have been describing above, is being modified by contact with the Burmese

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quires the desired strength or percentage of alcohol. Distilled liquor is obtained by boiling the fermented beverage in a closed vessel, from the top of which issues a bamboo pipe that leads to another vessel in which the steam condenses. A more concentrated solution of alcohol is thus secured. On the plains the glutinous rice, which is raised there, is much more commonly used in making liquor than the ordinary grain, because it contains a higher percentage of sugar. The plains possess another source of intoxicant in the "toddy-palms." (See pp. 105 and 220.) The juice of these palms, which exudes from the cut stems of the fronds, is collected and allowed to ferment, thus producing a liquor that is responsible for much of the crime committed by the rural people of all races.

In former days, in the more backward Karen districts and in Siam, the preparation of drink constituted a considerable part of the work of the women. It was used with every meal and was regarded as a necessary part of the native diet. Large quantities of liquor were provided for every festival. But its use is lessening among the more progressive natives and is rapidly disappearing among the Christian Karens.

The use of betel and tobacco is prevalent among the Karen people. Indeed, one might say that it is almost universal among them. The betel-box is always carried on a journey and is ever at hand where work is being done. When the guest arrives, the first act of hospitality is to push the box, replenished with its masticatories, in front of him. Betel, in the estimation of the Karen, forms a part of his food. Small bits of the areca-nut are laid on a fresh green leaf of the piper betel vine; lime is also smeared on the leaf, and perhaps a few cloves or shreds of tobacco leaf are added; the betel leaf is then folded into a wad and put into the mouth. In the process of chewing this "quid" the saliva is turned to a bright red, being secreted in such quantity that frequent expectoration is necessary. Wherever this spittle falls it leaves a red stain. The interior walls of the houses, especially in the corners, and the floors near the cracks are much stained with red. It is not safe to stop under a window or beneath a house, unless one is sure that nobody is within. An early missionary, who traveled with a white pony, was surprised one morning to find his animal wonderfully streaked with red, which yielded only to a vigorous washing. Betel chewing stains the teeth black, though it does not materially injure them, except that the hard usage wears them down or causes them to break off prematurely. Karens often speak of a short space of

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608 572 and a young woman. If the relationship is formed by the latter they probably have met at a funeral celebration and become interested in each other. The ceremonial requires each of the pair to twist seven strands of cotton into a cord to serve as a necklace. The youth first puts his cord over the young woman's head, taking great care not to touch her head-dress or person. In similar fashion the young woman slips her cord over the young man's head. Probably a formula was originally repeated in confirmation of this dual action. If so, it has vanished together with any consultation of the chicken bones that may have taken place. The cords must be worn seven days without being broken or removed, lest the agreement be made void. Thereafter they address each other only as "mwi." The relation thus established does not allow one to take any liberties with the other, but rather tends to the safeguarding of each as if they were brother and sister. The relationship is supposed to be for life, but does not, of course, prevent the separation of the two by a greater or less distance. In such an event, when one goes into the neighborhood of the other, a present is taken along for one's "mwi." Often mementoes or gifts are exchanged when the compact is first made. It is current usage for school friends to call on another "mwi" without any ceremony, but simply in token of kindly regard. [431]

THE GUEST-CHAMBER AND CLUB-ROOM

574 576 [688] In the earlier days among the Karen of the hills the "blaw" was an important feature of village life.[1] It is still retained, although it seems to have lost some of its former significance. This is the guest and club-room reserved in the central part of the village-house. Strangers coming in for a visit or passing by on their journey are entertained here. Such a convenience was quite necessary in the days when the tabu of the "Bgha" feast was strictly observed, and no outsider was allowed to enter the family-rooms. My party and I have been entertained in the "blaw" of villages in the Pegu Hills on the Tharrawaddy side, while on tour. In one village, which had adopted some Buddhist practices, along one side of the guest-room extended a high shelf upon which stood a small image of Gautama Buddha, with the usual offerings of paper flags and wilted leaves and flowers. At the back of the room was the raised dais on which I spread my bed, but I was put

[1] In Sir J. G. Scott's *Burma, A Handbook*, p. 123, this institution is referred to under the name of "haw." See also *Upper Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Pt. I, 338, 2.

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vented from enjoying a good night's rest by the number of other occupants. My cook prepared my meals at the little fireplace in the middle of the room. The villagers sat about and visited with us. When meal-time came the women and girls brought in their generous supplies of food, consisting of two large trays piled high with snow-white steaming rice, besides smaller trays and bowls filled with several kinds of curry, "ngape" water, and vegetables. The visitors were expected to eat something from every dish. While the meal was in progress the hosts withdrew, except one or two elders, the women returning afterwards to clear away the dishes and uneaten food with the polite remark that their guests had eaten very little. Many shared in receiving us; and we were spared the embarrassment, not to say the danger according to our belief, of violating the tabu that prevented our being entertained at the time by a family in their own quarters.

Besides serving as a guest-chamber, the "blaw" has another important use, namely, as the gathering-place for the young men of the village. When a boy becomes a youth ("hpo tha hkwa taw"), he is expected to spend his leisure time in his parents' room, working and eating with them, as seems to be the custom. When evening comes, he repairs to the "blaw" to be with his fellows and to sleep there. This is a custom that is common among the Kachins of Burma and many other tribes of the Orient. Among the Kachins the "blaw" is a place of license. The Brecs also allow a great deal of liberty to their young people, and evidently advantage of it is taken by them. But among the Sgaw Karens, at any rate, the girls remain with their mothers. There is no common room for the girls, or any place where both youths and maidens may meet for restrained intercourse. No doubt among the Karen the use of the "blaw" as a club-room is for the purpose of keeping the young men together and separating them from the young women, thus preventing offence of the "by na," which would bring a curse upon the soil and damage to the crops.

It has never been possible for parents to prevent all social intercourse between young people of the opposite sexes. In fact, it has hardly ever been attempted. As is shown elsewhere in this volume, there are occasions among the Karen when the sexes mingle, for example, on fishing expeditions and at marriages, funerals, etc. If, however, a youth desires to visit a maiden, etiquette prescribes the way: he must take his harp ("t'na"), appear before her house, and serenade her. Sitting down, he sings to the accom-

[ie Not being allowed in family rooms during the Bgha fe25t -- Analyst]

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have swathed the heads of their foes. That is, their hosts by partaking of the talisman would become so confused as to fail to seize their weapons when needed for defense and would be overwhelmed by the enemy. Unlike the spies of Israel these Karen spies, on their return, usually gave a favorable report and displayed great eagerness for the combat.

The instigator of the foray now sent out for his men, who came not only from his own village, but also from neighboring ones where he had friends and blood-brothers. He might gather in as many as two hundred warriors. These he feasted, but before passing around the liquor he poured some on the ground as a kind of libation, while praying:

"Lord of the seven heavens and the seven earths. Lord of the rivers and streams, the mountains and hills. We give thee liquor to drink and rice to eat. Help us, we entreat thee. We will go forth now and attack yon village. We have swathed the heads of the inhabitants. Assist us. Render their minds oblivious and cause them to forget themselves, that they may sleep heavily and their slumber may be unbroken. Let not a dog bark at us, nor a hog grunt at us. Grant that the villagers may not seize a bow, sword, or spear. May the Lord help my children and grandchildren who go to attack yon village, and may he deliver them from all harm. May they subdue their enemies and not be lost. May they be delivered from the bow, the sword, and the spear."

After this prayer the elders drank in turn of the liquor, and it was then circulated freely among the assembled warriors. The instigator of the foray now killed a fowl, preparatory to inspecting its bones for a favorable omen as to the success of the undertaking, but before the inspection he offered up the following petition:

"Fowl, possessor of superhuman powers, fore-endowed with divine intelligence, thou scratchest with thy feet and peckest with thy bill. Thou goest to Hku Te (the king of death). Thou goest to The Na (monarch of death). Thou goest to Shi U, the brother of God. Thou goest into the presence of God. Thou seest unto the verge of heaven and unto the edge of the horizon. I now purpose to go and attack yon village. Shall we be hit? Shall we be obstructed? If we go, shall we suffer? Shall we die by the bow? Shall we be pierced by the spear? Shall we grow weary or exhaust ourselves? If so, reveal thyself unfavorably." [1]

[1] This prayer, in which superhuman powers are attributed to the fowl, is similar to prayers of the Kenyus of Borneo, who ascribe like powers to the pig.

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supply themselves with pieces of plantain leaf and in turn help themselves from each of the three leaves while praying: "O Lord of the great spirits, do thou, who carest for us, prevent all sickness and sorrow from approaching us. May we be protected from injury by sharp sticks of bamboo and wood, by the arrows and spears of our enemies, and from all evil that may befall us. Wilt thou be our shield and defense." Through a small bamboo tube the grandmother-priestess drinks a little liquor from the pot, as do her relatives in their turn. She then points a newly sprouted plantain leaf at the skull of the pig, which has been hung up over her mat, and repeats the last prayer. Then all drink a little more of the liquor and are ready to follow the example of the priestess in partaking of the feast.

The earthen pot, in which the pork has been cooked, is intended to remind the kindred that they are children of the earth; while the bamboo joints, in which some of the offerings have been prepared, serve to keep before their minds the temporary character of their bamboo houses and utensils.

Customs Incidental to the "Bgha" Feasts

Certain customs and tabus incidental to the "Bgha" feasts should be noted. Unless all the members of the family are present at such a ceremony, except those excluded from the feast, the offerings are thought to be objectionable to the "Bgha." If a person absents himself from a feast that is being held to promote the recovery of a sick relative, he is suspected of desiring the continued illness or the death of the sick one. Or his absence may be interpreted as an effort to bring calamity upon some member of the family. Such charges are made against the member of a family who becomes a Christian and remains away from the ceremony. The others allege that he no longer retains his affection for his kindred and is willing to bring illness and disaster upon them by his absence, which angers the "Bgha."

While the feasts are in progress, no stranger is permitted to enter the family-room. When I first traveled in the hills, I noticed that as I passed through the corridor of a village-house some member of a family stood in the doorway of one or another of the family-rooms to prevent my entering. This seemed strange, in view of the fact that I was usually received with cordial hospitality. On inquiry I found that the guarding of the door was to keep me from

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unwittingly rendering their offerings futile. The advantage of the village guest-room then became clear to me. There I and other strangers could be entertained, and there the men who were ineligible to attend the feast of the family they had married into could congregate and visit, while their relatives were participating in the "Bgha" ceremony.

The idea of sacrifice is undoubtedly at the root of the "Bgha" feasts. According to the explanation of an old Karen woman, when one has offended the family spirit or, as the people say, has "hit the 'Bgha'" ("pgha ba Bgha"), one has fallen on the worst possible fate; for the demon will seek to devour the life principle ("k' la") of the unfortunate one, unless propitiated by offerings of chicken and pork. The "Bgha" is supposed to be satisfied with the "k' la" of these sacrifices, which constitute the best eating within the knowledge of the Karen people. Even those who no longer fear their "Bgha" will call in the members of their family and make a feast, principally on account of their own enjoyment of it. In such cases they add the spices for a curry, instead of cooking the meat with only salt and chili. The Karen, especially those of Shwegyin, declare that fornication, adultery, and incest anger the family spirits more than any other offenses. Such acts of immorality incite the "Bgha" to curse the soil, blight the crops, and send epidemics among the people. Once aroused, a "Bgha" will assume the form of a tiger or snake and wait for its victims, in order to destroy the "k'las" of the offenders and other inhabitants of their village. In case of a poor season and bad crops the elders become suspicious and sometimes succeed in scaring young persons into a confession of their secret sins. Unusual offerings are required to appease the offended demon, these being—according to one list in my possession—first, a buffalo, next, an ox, and finally, a chicken and a pig. All the family must unite in an earnest prayer that these offerings may prove acceptable to the "Bgha" and avert any further calamities from them. The great fear of blighted crops, and of other evils not less feared because unknown, tends to keep the Karen a chaste people, which they certainly are for the most part.[2]

The traditional explanation of the use of the chicken bones and the pig's gall-bladder in divination, and of pork and fowls in the family feasts, is that the chickens and pigs ate most of the fragments of the God-given book which the white brother delivered to

[2] See pp. 30, 139, 142, 148, 192, 225, 288.

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of child-bearing to other members of the village. MacMahon states that the Bwe husband of a newly delivered mother complies with the custom of cutting fresh bamboo joints, in which he draws and heats the water for bathing the infant, over a fire kindled by himself in the open. He then carries the water to his wife's room up a new ladder, which he has made. After his wife has washed the child or he himself, in case she is too weak to do so, he hangs the bamboo joints under the house and leaves them there for six days before they may be used again.[6] On the day of the birth of a child, or even of a domestic animal, members of the village are forbidden to work. This is the tabu of births ("ta dū ta ble").

In the early times widows and orphans, as well as persons found to be holding improper relations, became tabu and were expelled from the village, in order to keep other inhabitants from falling under the vengeance of the evil-working demon, whose attention might be diverted from his first victims. The driving of these unfortunates into the jungle to live there by themselves, may be described as a kind of primitive quarantine.[6] Precaution of a different kind was at the bottom of the requirement that a visiting stranger should enter and leave the village-house by the same ladder. It was also required that the visitor must descend the ladder while facing inwards. Leaving the house by a different way from that by which one had entered, created suspicion of hostile intent among the inhabitants and might lead to hostilities. Like other neighboring peoples, the Karen observe a tabu in regard to women's garments, which must not come in contact with a man. Garments that are put out to dry must be hung away from the common paths in some inconspicuous place. Probably this custom originated in the fear that the supposed weakness of woman might be communicated to the men. For the same reason, evidently, the Brec tribe prohibits married men from taking part in making the coffin for a woman who has died in child-birth.

Tabus connected with portents, such as eclipses of the moon, earthquakes, the cries of apes, and certain strange sounds in the jungle, have a religious significance for the Karen and are accompanied by the prohibition of work for one or more days. The witnesses of these portents are seized with fear, drop their work, and stand about in helplessness. This, undoubtedly, is the normal behavior of primitive people under such circumstances. They as-

[6] MacMahon, *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, p. 228.
[6] See Chapter XIV on Social Conditions, pp. 193, 194.